



Graphic Design: A Guide for Buyers

Graphic Design

Connected throughout history to writing, printing and publishing, graphic design is a creative process that uses art and technology to communicate. It begins with a message that, in the hands of an experienced graphic designer, is transformed into visual communication that transcends words. By controlling colour, type, images and ideas, the graphic designer creates and manages the production of materials which convey the message to an intended audience.

Over the past thirty years, graphic design has emerged as a complex service-profession primarily concerned with problem solving: with communicating concepts appropriate to a client's needs. In today's information-based society, the demands placed upon graphic designers require intelligence, responsibility and versatility.

Graphic design is integral to our lives. It encompasses:

- trademarks
- symbols
- identity programs
- stationery
- brochures
- product literature
- annual reports
- diagrams, graphs and maps
- books
- packaging
- posters
- exhibits and displays
- advertising
- sign systems
- environmental graphics
- television
- film and video
- websites
- computer graphics.

Business & Design

Design significantly affects the way an organization is perceived by its many publics. It contributes to the success of an enterprise by influencing customers, stockholders, employees, analysts and others.

"Design is a potent strategy tool that companies can use to gain a substantial competitive advantage. Yet most companies neglect design as a strategy tool. What they don't realize is that design can enhance products, environments, communications and corporate identity."

Effective design is invaluable in helping a company or its products reach full potential in the marketplace. In addition to projecting a company's unique assets, positively distinguishing it from competitors, good design facilitates many benefits including a higher level of internal morale, greater public recognition, higher standards of performance, better recruitment, and in turn higher productivity and profitability. Good design is good business.

Evaluating Design Needs

Names, symbols, stationery, buildings, signs, advertising, vehicles; in short, all visual references to an organization have a lasting effect on public perception. A detailed, objective appraisal of these components, individually and as a unit, is central to evaluating design needs.

Is the right message being communicated? Are the organization's strengths being conveyed? Is the target audience being reached? Is the message positive, clear, comprehensive and unified?

Careful consideration should be given to long- and short-term goals and market positioning strategy. A review of the visual presentation of competitors may also be in order.

The Design Process

As professionals, graphic designers are communication strategists who combine aesthetic judgement with project management. Typically this process involves four phases:

1. Project Planning & Familiarization

- Client conferences to establish goals scheduling and budget, as well as content requirements, visual requirements and production considerations.
- An extensive review of business plan and marketing strategy is often necessary.

2. Concept Development

- Design proposal and rough layout for the client's evaluation and approval. This usually includes preliminary specifications for typography, photography or illustration, paper, and printing technique.
- Refinement of design proposal and preparation of revised and more detailed sketches (comprehensives) for final approval.

3. Production & Implementation

- Direction of typesetting, photography and illustration.
- Preparation of rough assembly incorporating typography, photography, charts, etc.
- Ongoing client liaison for proofreading and correction purposes.
- Assembly of "camera-ready artwork" (computer files).
- Preparation of detailed printing specifications.



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4. Quality control & supervision

- Quality control and client liaison to achieve final approvals of colour proofs, blueprints, presswork and finishing of printed matter.

A responsibility exists for both client and designer to define precise the scope of work. If the initial assignment changes because of unforeseen circumstances, the client can expect to be advised and any fee changes mutually agreed upon.

Choosing Designers

Much is at stake in the process of visual communication: in addition to the credibility of an organization, there are the costs of printing materials, photography, illustration and writing. A well-conceived design makes the investment of time and money worthwhile.

An organization requiring the use of graphic design services is advised to review the work of several professional designers.

An evaluation should consider:

- the appropriateness of design solutions to a project's communication objectives
- cost- and time-effectiveness
- the designer's reputation and existing client relationships.

Should evaluation on a competition basis be desired, the correct course of action is to:

- evaluate firms through interviews; visit www.gdc.net and click "Find a Designer" to locate nationally certified designers in your region.
- select for competition only those designers in whom there is serious interest
- pay a reasonable honorarium for schematic presentations prior to commissioning the successful competitor.

A professional designer does not engage in contests or other speculative, uncompensated commercial projects.

Working with Designers

A productive client/designer relationship requires teamwork. Client and designer must recognize each other's areas of expertise; they must listen to and learn from one another.

Just as it is important for the needs of the client to be articulated and fully understood, so too should the designer's needs in the creative, concept-development process be recognized. Good ideas cannot be called-up on demand like a computer file. Time and a measure of freedom are necessary for creative work.

Good design flourishes in an atmosphere of mutual respect that is professional, objective and alert to good ideas.

The Society of Graphic Designers of Canada

The GDC is a national, non-profit organization, chartered in 1976, which conducts educational activities, exhibitions, publications, and competitions for the benefit of Canadian industry and commerce, and the general public.

As a professional organization, the GDC has formulated a code of ethics that seeks to establish fair and productive relationships between designers and their clients.

Always choose a GDC Certified Designer

Professional Memberships in the GDC fall into three categories of certification:

Fellowship (FGDC) Awarded to professional members who, by accomplishment or influence, have made a major contribution to graphic design in Canada. This is the Society's highest honour.

Professional Membership (MGDC)

Certification is awarded to a practicing designer who has completed at least 7 years, in total, of combined graphic design education and professional practice, instruction, or administration of graphic design, and, who passes a portfolio review.

Licentiate Membership (LGDC)

Awarded to a practicing professional designer who has completed at least 5 years and less than 7 years, in total, of combined graphic design education and professional practice, and, who passes a portfolio review.

The GDC is headquartered in Ottawa and has regional chapters throughout Canada.

Further information and a current list of GDC members is available by contacting the National Secretariat via e-mail at info@gdc.net or online at www.gdc.net.

Acknowledgement

Portions of this document are based on What is Graphic Design? produced by the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

1. Philip Kotler and G. Alexander Rath, "Design: a powerful but neglected strategy tool" The Journal of Business Strategy, Fall 1984, p.12